

Hèctor Parra: Sirrt die Sekunde (2008)

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VOICES, in green of watersurface
sketched. When the Kingfisher dives,
the second whizzes:

What stood by you
on either shore
it steps
mown into another scene.

Paul Celan, Stimmen* (1956–58)



In a summer afternoon of the year 1956 Paul Celan was walking with a friend along a riverside. Suddenly he noticed that an intense blue spark pierced the smooth wavy surface of the water, dived into it and immediately emerged with its beak as bow. Celan knew the name of the bird in French (alcyon), but not in German. Once at home he searched in its just acquired Brehm's Animal Encyclopaedia in four volumes and found its German name: Eisvogel which literally means Bird of Ice. Thus started an amazing poetic adventure that ended two years later with the completion of the poem Stimmen.

In the present piece, Celan's bird is converted into sounds, into voices that pierce and scratch the surface of the undisturbed audition. The kingfisher brings us unsuspected news of what apparently is an established part of our world. That of what you were confident may change in the twinkling of an eye, and the present time can be perturbed and transformed by the memories. The immersion in the sonic world of the piece will make us to feel progressively closer to the ultimate reason of the instrumental gestures that constitute it. We will have access to the truest nature of the sound forms presented at the beginning as engraved in the surface of the orchestral texture. The sixteen minutes of Sirrt die Sekunde constitute an abstract drama that chisels in the sonic spacetime the refraction of an intense and magical instant of creative freedom. A creative move that finds its outward expression as an sculpture of the musical time. Through the refractive prism of our perception, different musical events, sometimes sudden and abrupt, sometimes quietly evanescent, may converge to produce a most vivid experience of (human) life. In few seconds, polyphonically interwoven different emotional states, with different energies, will meet and coexist. Hence, we are auditory compelled to live each instant at high intensity and hyperconcentration. This process should eventually produce and place us in this vibrant and magical "dimensional extension" of spacetime in which our thought and musical expressivity feel free to move and create.

In more technical terms, in this (hyper)sonic adventure we have proceeded to establish an integral fusion between timber and harmony. To it we have added a polyphony that not only interweaves independent melodic lines, but extends its function as well to instrumental fibre bundles with a characteristic timber quality; a timber quality which is itself subject to a time evolution. With this extended set of chisels we have sculpted the piece from the macroscale to the microscale. Thus, this piece reflects my conviction that a deeper degree of integration between the different musical parameters, capable to produce and manage an extended sonic plasticity, is a most reliable signpost towards the achievement of new levels of musical expression.

Sirrt die Sekunde is dedicated to Peter Oswald, with warm friendship.

Hèctor Parra, 4-6-2008, Paris

Hèctor Parra (Barcelona, 1976) studied in the Conservatorium of Barcelona, where he was awarded Prizes with Distinction in Composition, Piano and Harmony. He has studied composition with David Padrós, Brian Ferneyhough and Jonathan Harvey, as well as with Michael Jarrell at the Haute École de Musique in Geneva. Master in Composition in the Paris-VIII University, Annual Cursus on Composition at Ircam and Post-Cursus in the CNSMD Lyon.

The Ensemble Intercontemporain, the Arditti Quartet, Ensemble Recherche, Musikfabrik, the Philharmonic Orchestra of Liège, Holland Symfonia, National Orchestra of Ile-de-France, KNM Berlin, Ensemble Alternance, Algoritmo Ensemble, Proxima Centauri, have premièred his work. He has received commissions from the French State, from the Ircam-Centre Pompidou in four occasions, from the Spanish Ministry of culture, from the Government of Catalonia and from institutions such as Berlin Academy of Arts, Ensemble Intercontemporain, ADK-Berlin, Strasbourg Festival, CDMC (Madrid), National Orchestra of Ile-de-France, IVM (Valencia), Musica de Hoy (X. Güell) – Schauspielhaus Salzburg, Caja Madrid and the Selmer Society (Paris). His music has been also played at the international festivals of Lucerne, Avignon, Agora-Ircam, Royaumont, Centre Acanthes, Forum Neues Musiktheater of the Stuttgart Opera House, Maison de la Danse de Lyon, Novart de Bordeaux, ADK Berlin, Quincena Musical de San Sebastián, Nous Sons Barcelona, Traiettorie-Parma, Muziekgebouw (Amsterdam), Philharmonie Luxembourg ...

In 2007 he has been awarded the Earplay Donald Aird Memorial International Composition Prize of San Francisco (USA). In 2005 he was unanimously awarded the Tremplin Prize given by the Ensemble Intercontemporain and was finalist in the International Gaudeamus Competition. In 2002 he won the INAEM Prize for Musical Composition (The National Institute for Performing Arts and Music of Spain). Editorial Tritó (Barcelona) publishes his music. Currently, he is Professor of Electro-Acoustic Composition at the Conservatorium of Zaragoza, invited professor at the Conservatorium of the Barcelona Opera House and composer in research at Ircam, Paris.